

La Revue Holstein Québec

July 2020
www.holsteinquebec.com



Equipment

Useful tools that benefit production

Modo Herd

Grandpa is partly to blame

Lesfilions Herd

Oh, the joys of the showring!



BY
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Useful equipment that benefits production

We've all heard the good reports about robotic milkers, but there are a number of other types of equipment that can benefit dairy production as well. The equipment may impact production directly, or, by improving cow comfort, improve the quantity and quality of milk, and in turn, farm profitability.

Whether the cows are housed in free-stall or tie-stall facilities, stalls have a tremendous impact on their comfort level. Normand Bigué, a sales representative for Beaudry équipements laitiers, mentions the flexible PVC stalls that are quite popular in free-stall housing, but which can also be used in conventional barns. As Mr. Bigué explains, the flexibility, particularly if the stalls are narrow, increases comfort and reduces injuries among cows.

PVC tie rails, which are also flexible, can make it easier for cows to get up and lie down, thus preventing strain. Alternatively, tie rails can be replaced with chains. In either case, the position, both the height (more

research on this point is needed) and the distance from the gutter are important, as is the length of the chain, which must long enough to ensure the animals can move around comfortably. Stalls can also be equipped with headlocks, which act as dividers and prevent cows from pilfering their neighbours' rations.

Standards and recommendations to this effect are outlined in the Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals - Dairy Cattle (www.nfacc.ca/codes-de-pratiques/bovins-laitiers) and on the Canadian Dairy Research Portal (www.dairyresearch.ca/animal-comfort-tool.php).

Improved resting

Sand is increasingly popular as a bedding material, as it facilitates rising movements and provides a high level of comfort when the animals are lying down. Since we now have evidence that resting time influences milk yield, any changes that increase the amount of time cows spend lying down is worth considering. With that in mind, mattresses and mats have become essentials. Nowadays, we're most often talking about made-to-measure matting padded with three-inch cones. Producers can buy it by the roll, in specific widths and lengths, and unroll it over the concrete in the stalls. But even with floor mats, bedding is still required. Bedding keepers, or preformed mats that are thicker



It's a safe bet that these cows aren't short of air and are lying on a comfortable surface with plenty of bedding.



Calves also like to be brushed.

in the back and play the same role, prevent straw or wood chips from falling in the gutter, thus increasing cow comfort.

Mats can also be installed in the alleys. The grooved surface prevents slipping, and because the mats are more comfortable than concrete, they protect the cows' hooves and make it easier for them to move around. Moreover, because the cows are more at ease, it is easier to identify the animals in heat.

A brush for my back

Cows in free-stall housing particularly enjoy having access to a brush. One brush is usually enough for 60 cows. By rubbing on the brush, cows keep themselves cleaner and more comfortable. Scratching also stimulates blood circulation, which substantially impacts milk production. Another benefit is that cows with access to a brush are less likely to rub themselves against structural elements in the barn, which can cause skin irritation. Lastly, because mechanical brushes are equipped with silent motors, they are not an additional source of stress. But, as Mr. Bigué points out, the efficiency of the brush depends a great deal on its location in the barn. Brushes should be installed in easily accessible areas, with sufficient space and ventilation, to prevent dominant cows from monopolizing the area and keeping the rest of the cows

away. For the same reason, installing a brush in a corner is not recommended, because subordinate cows will be unlikely to access it. To improve efficiency, Naomie Laroche, herd management advisor for Équipements A. Provencher et fils inc., suggests reversing the rotation direction when the bristles become flattened and replacing the brush when the bristles are worn too short.

Calves also enjoy the brushes, says Ms. Laroche. A smaller, lower-speed model is available for animals 3 to 12 months old, with adjustable height to take into account growth or the thickness of the bedding in the pens. Increased blood circulation and the calming effect on the animals contribute to faster growth. Patrice Dubuc, sales representative for Équipements de ferme C. Lesage inc., adds that it is important to think about dry cows as well, as they also need comfort and relaxation.

Improved feeding

The representatives consulted here stress the importance of properly preparing and distributing feed to the animals. Ration mixers are often mentioned, as they save time and ensure a homogenous mix. Moreover, they can be completely automated, which means the ration is prepared and distributed at a set time, without the producer having to be in the barn. A regular schedule has a positive effect on milk production, thus making these mixers a profitable investment, according to Mr. Bigué. For his part, Mr. Dubuc points out that this equipment also cuts feed to the right particle length to stimulate the rumen. The important thing, he says, is to have a mixer that really cuts the whole ration to the desired



During a heat wave, extra ventilation is often useful, as the basic system cannot maintain a comfortable temperature for the cows. ➔

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Mixers are designed to prepare and distribute feed accurately. On some farms, these operations are automated.

length. In addition to improving feed digestibility, the proper particle size helps prevent rejection.

Feed is placed in front of the cows, often on concrete. Another option now available to producers, explains Ms. Laroche, is a food-grade plastic sheet, which is resistant to both acid and alkaline substances, such as saliva and silage, and is not conducive to bacterial growth. The sheeting is sold in rolls of 1 or 1.2 m in width and can be installed with an aluminum strip across any flat surface in front of the cows. Easy to clean, ideally once a day with a broom, the plastic increases feed intake, says Ms. Laroche. Producers often opt for sheeting once the concrete is worn down, but, as Ms. Laroche underlines, it is also

recommended on new concrete, to get the benefits right from the start. The plastic surface is extremely resistant to wear, and can even be driven over by a tractor.

To stimulate feed intake, an automated feed pusher is increasingly considered as a useful ally for producers. Installation requires a flat floor surface and enough space for the device to move around. This equipment has a number of benefits. By moving the ration closer to the cows, feed pushers encourage consumption. Moreover, because they are relatively quiet, they contribute to a calm environment in the barn, which resting cows appreciate. According to Mr. Dubuc, the cost of the equipment is offset by an increase in milk production equivalent to 2 kg/cow/day.

Mr. Bigué mentions that some models remix the feed while pushing it back to the feed bunk, reducing the risk of the feed overheating and limiting sorting by cows.

Water intake is also crucial. Water bowls must be accessible in sufficient number and size to meet the needs of the herd, but flow is also important, says Mr. Bigué. The recommended flow rate is 40 litres per minute. Stainless steel water bowls are often preferred, and it is important to make sure the pipework provides enough pressure to fill the number of bowls in use. Lastly, mentions Mr. Dubuc, it is important that water bowls be cleaned at least once a week to ensure a constant supply of clean, fresh water.



Plastic sheeting for feed bunks keeps rations clean and more appetizing.

A change of air

Although not a new concept, good ventilation is a must, especially, say the representatives consulted, now that stretches of hot weather are becoming more frequent. If in winter the aim is primarily to control the humidity level, in summer the challenge is to maintain a comfortable temperature for all the animals, regardless of where they are in the barn. As Mr. Dubuc points out, good air quality has a positive effect on health, which in turn improves longevity. If the temperature is not ideal throughout the building, particularly where the brushes are installed, dominant cows will monopolize the most comfortable areas and the others will suffer in the warmer sections.

Milking

All of the suppliers install state-of-the-art technology. But as Mr. Dubuc underlines, "All of these systems are good, but they need proper maintenance." In particular, he stresses the importance of changing the teat cup liners on a regular basis. Some companies even offer that service to ensure it is done as often as required.

All these different new systems also reduce milking time and prevent slippage and whistling with better vacuum control. Likewise, they are said to contribute to improved udder health. Among the latest cutting-edge technology offered by a number of suppliers are milking units with four separate chambers that improve milk quality and reduce the risks of contamination.

Some manufacturers also offer special features. In particular, Mr. Dubuc mentions the IQ milking unit equipped with the Apollo™ MilkSystem. When the cow is finished milking, the system applies post-dip to the teats before removal and then disinfects the milking unit. Ms. Laroche points to the Eanza milking cluster, which, in addition to its other features, cuts maintenance time by half by eliminating the need to change the liners. The system uses cartridges instead, which take less than a minute to change and only require changing every six months when milking is done twice a day.

Lastly, Mr. Bigué explains the advantages of the Espresso detachable, which, in addition to its primary function, also analyses milk quality by measuring both temperature and

conductivity. A high concentration of sodium ions indicates that a cow has a health problem, which should be investigated and treated as needed.■



Automated feed pushers improve feeding and ensure a calm environment for cows.



New additions to milking equipment: top, an IQ milking unit equipped with an Apollo™ MilkSystem; down, teat cup cartridges for the Eanza milking cluster.



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Ferme Filiking A resilient family

In 1997, Julie Filion and her spouse, Michel Kingsbury, acquired the herd that belonged to the Filion family and moved to a new farm in Saint-Hermas (Mirabel). Following Michel's death in 2013, Julie and her three children, Myriam, Marie-Ève and Yan, decided to continue farming. Their passion for cows enabled them to get through a difficult period in their

FERME FILIKING

Herd: 115 head, including 57 lactating cows

Production: 9603 kg of milk, 4.1% fat and 3.4% protein

BCA: 216-233-228

Quota: 64 kg BF/day

Classification: 1 M EX, 27 VG and 25 GP

Crops: 16 ha seeded to corn and an alfalfa-timothy mixture harvested as silage and stored in trench silos. To complete the ration (TMR), they purchase a supplement, hay and some straw. Dry cows and show heifers are put out on pasture.

These outside influences also led Julie to attend dairy shows at agricultural fairs, where she and her children became interested in taking part. To increase their chances of success, they were also motivated to acquire better animals. It was to that end that in 2007 they purchased *Champs D'or Magna Maryfee II*, VG-3yr 3*, a cow that left her mark on the herd, in particular through her daughter *Lesfilions Goldwyn Marinoe*, VG-3yr 1*. In four lactations, *Marinoe* produced 53 036 kg of milk, with 4.6% fat and 3.6% protein, for BCAs of 236-288-264. She is the dam of one daughter classified VG, *Lesfilions Elude Marie*, third Intermediate Heifer Calf at Expo Rive-Nord in 2016, and three daughters classified GP. One of the latter, *Lesfilions Samuël Marisamme*, GP-83-2yr, stands out for her fat levels, which averaged 5.3% over two lactations.

At that time, however, Julie's interest in good-looking cows had not yet evolved into a desire to develop good cow families. Then, one day, François Paiement explained to Julie how important that aspect was if she aspired to become a Master Breeder. A few judicious purchases had Julie heading in that direction.

Among them, Julie talks about *Mazylake RFL Mleader Brittany*, EX-93 3E 2*, dam to seven daughters, including one EX and four VG. Purchased in 2013, she gave birth to a number of male calves before finally producing some



**Coti Brawler Francine, VG-88,
first 4 Year Old in Lachute in 2017**

beautiful heifers. The Lesfilions herd currently includes two VG and two GP animals from that family, in addition to nine yearlings and heifers, a few of which are starting their first lactation or are preparing to calve for the first time.

In the showring, *Brittany* was crowned Grand Champion in Ormstown, in 2013, and won first Mature Cow at both the Ormstown show and Expo Rive-Nord the following year. Julie also wanted to have a few heifers so that her children could take part in young farmers' competitions. Among *Brittany's* daughters, *Lesfilions Acrobat Brit*, VG-87, won first Senior Yearling in Lachute in 2017.

Another addition to the herd, *Bobasy/ Dundee Rosa Glow*, EX-92 3E, was purchased in 2012, in co-ownership with Ferme Blondin, and won Reserve Grand Champion in Lachute that same year. After five lactations, she has a lifetime production of 93 308 kg of milk (292-261-280). She is the dam of four daughters bearing the Lesfilions prefix, three of which are classified VG. Among them, *Lesfilions Goldsun Rose* produced a 305-day yield of 12 541 kg of milk in her third lactation, with 3.9% fat and 3.4% protein, and BCAs of 247-263-270.

Photo : Courtesy of Ferme Filiking



► The Ferme Filiking herd has 115 animals, including 57 lactating cows.

A triple test of their resilience

After the death of her first partner, Julie stayed on the farm with her three children, continuing to operate the dairy herd. A new partner, Hugues, later joined the team. Although not from an agricultural background, he quickly learned to love cows. Unfortunately for the family, a motorcycle accident cost him his life. Julie and her family nevertheless found the strength to carry on.

Then another partner, Serge, appeared in Julie's life. With an avid interest in breeding and showing dairy cows, he devoted endless energy to helping the girls achieve their dream of choosing, fitting and leading their heifers in the showing. Regrettably for the family once again, Serge died of cancer.

Julie and her three children have shown remarkable resilience in the face of adversity. The Lesfilions herd and their catering business are both thriving operations. As Julie says: "Life is short, so best we do what we like, because we won't get a second chance." Her recipe is simple: "We put love in our soup of the day!"

Photo : Ferme Filiking



Julie Filion, second from left, with her three children (from left): Marie-Ève, Myriam and Yan Kingsbury.



Myriam Kingsbury with *Coti Brawler Francine*, after winning first 4 Year Old.

Ponde Atwood Emeraude, VG-87-2yr 1*, was purchased in February 2014, at the age of three, and is now dam to three VG daughters. At the time she joined the Lesfilions herd, *Emeraude* was pregnant with *Sicy Gold Chip Emmarose*, named third Summer Yearling at Expo Rive-Nord the following year. *Coti Brawler Francine*, VG-88, co-owned with Ferme Cloutier et frères, has also done the family proud, winning the Four Year Old class in Lachute, in 2017.

Developing cows the way they like them

Julie Filion and her children initially preferred big strong cows. That approach changed in 2005, however, after they built a free-stall

barn and acquired a robotic milker. Nonetheless, Julie wasn't entirely satisfied with the new setup. "You spend the day in the barn," she says, "but you don't see the cows." She adds that the experience made her realize that she was not cut out for commercial cows. "We're too maternal," she explains, "but we're trying to change." In 2010, the family went back to tie stalls, a move that now allows her and her daughters to develop the type of cow that they really like. They say they're aiming for the best of both worlds: production and conformation.

With regard to sires, they limit their selection to bulls that have a proof of at least +10 for conformation and +1000 for milk. More specifically, Julie and her daughters focus first on udders, and then feet and legs. Moreover, says Julie, since they are a female team, they also want good-natured cows. "They have to be easy to play with," she explains. So sire selection entails a serious family discussion, which is also a good opportunity for Marie-Ève to put her genetics courses into practice. Their selection is limited almost entirely to proven sires, which are used for 75 per cent of services.

At the moment, embryo collection doesn't play a part in their breeding strategy, although they have used the technology in the past, in particular with *Brittany*. But, as Julie points out, with a small herd, they have to be careful if they want to maintain diversity.

A new generation in the air

Like their mother, Julie's two daughters have a keen interest in dairy breeding. Marie-Ève is now studying agriculture at Macdonald College, while Myriam, now in Secondary IV, is happy when she's on the farm. As for Yan, he is especially drawn to the field work. In addition to attending to the fields on their farm, he also helps his grandfather with the crops, and has joined him as a partner in working the sugarbush. He also works for other producers in the area.

A dual focus

In addition to her love of fine cows, Julie Filion loves cooking. To give free rein to that passion, she runs a catering service with her son Yan. The two girls also lend a hand to the operation.

For Julie, maintaining "numerous interests keeps the brain healthy," and she quickly adds that "with my family, we do what we like to do, and what we don't like we leave to others." Obviously, managing two concurrent businesses requires a good deal of energy and countless hours of work. "That's why my mother often goes to bed late," says Myriam. ■

BY
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Ferme Modo

Captivated by the fun of the showring

Florian Mondou had a passion for breeding and became a member of Holstein Canada as early as 1963. Today, it is his granddaughter Vanessa who is in charge of the Modo herd in Mirabel, where conformation and a keen interest in the show circuit feature high on the list of priorities.

FERME MODO

Herd: 85 head, including 49 lactating cows

Production: 10 237 kg of milk, with 4.07% fat and 3.36% protein

BCA: 217-239-229

Quota: 58 kg BF/day

Classification: 3 M EX, 2 EX, 19 VG, 19 GP and 6 G

Crops: to feed the herd, 60 ha are seeded to silage corn and an alfalfa/timothy/bromegrass mixture, harvested mostly as silage, and oats and peas used as cover crops, but also harvested as silage. Hay is purchased as required, and the ration is augmented with a supplement fed at a maximum rate of 2 kg/cow/day.

Mondou, production is also a focus. Vanessa began working on the farm full time in 2008, after completing a DVS in Dairy Production and a DCS in Farm Management. Genetics is now her main area of interest, and she has been involved at that level since 2006.

Vanessa tells their stories

Many breeders introduce their cows with a list of accomplishments and the numbers to back them up. For Vanessa, however, the pleasure is also – and perhaps more so – in having a story to tell about each of them.

She starts by talking about *Senyville Patty Outside*, VG-86-3yr 2*, born on the farm after her dam was acquired in 2000. Vanessa recounts that *Patty* was born prematurely, and that her father had put her in the shower with a heat lamp. The calf benefited from that attention, developing into a cow that greatly influenced the herd through her four daughters, classified 1 EX, 2 VG and 1 GP. In all, says Vanessa, she has had over 30 descendants in the barn, 10 of which are still there today. *Patty's* granddaughter, *Modo*

Patricia Hero, VG-86, demonstrates the same strengths, producing 45 895 kg of milk in three lactations, with fat and protein levels at 4.6 and 3.4 per cent, respectively, and BCAs of 239-286-249.

Among the show cows, Vanessa's favourite is *Modo Lola Jordan*, EX-92 2E, the herd's highest classified cow. It was with *Lola* that Vanessa learned the ropes of the showring in

Photo : Holstein World



Vanessa Mondou, with her grandfather Florian Mondou, at an auction.

2012, exhibiting her in the Yearling class at both the Lachute and Rive-Nord fairs. In 2013, *Lola* won second Junior 2 Year Old and Best Bred and Owned at the Eastern Ontario Western Quebec Championship. Vanessa still

As Vanessa stresses, however, their involvement in the show world is for enjoyment only, not for commercial purposes. In the operation she runs with her father, Guy

Ferme Mondou, home to the 85-head Modo herd

Photo : Courtesy of the Mondou family



Thank you Grandpa

Vanessa owes her passion for breeding to her grandfather Florian Mondou. He became a member of Holstein Canada in 1963, was a director of the Club Holstein des Laurentides and also chaired the Société d'agriculture in his region in the 1970s. It was at that time that *Modo Aline Canuck* became the farm's first cow to classify EX, going on to win Reserve Grand Champion in Berthier and first 4 Year Old in Trois-Rivières, in 1981. Now 92 years old, Florian Mondou continues to take an interest in the herd's future and participates in some of the Holstein Club's activities.

Vanessa is not only following in her grandfather's footsteps where breeding is concerned, but within the Holstein Club as well, where she has been the secretary since 2009. The experience "immersed her even more in genetics," she explains, and, that same year, inspired her to buy four cows to breed for the showing, one of which was *Cloudis Champion Laila*, dam to *Lola*.

Born in 1977, *Modo Aline Canuck* was the first cow registered under Florian Mondou's prefix to be classified EX. ▶

Involvement in the community is clearly a family affair, since Ferme Modo also hosted a field day for the Société d'agriculture in 1990, and an open house for the Holstein Club in 2012.



Photo : Courtesy of the Mondou family



The Modo herd has been under the leadership of three successive generations of the Mondou family. From left: Florian, the grandfather, Guy, the father, and his daughter Vanessa.

remembers how proud she was of that win. She also recalls refusing a number of offers to buy *Lola*. "She was my show baby," she says, justifying her reluctance to sell. At the time of her early death in April 2018, *Lola* had only three daughters, one of which is *Modo Lolita Sid*, first Senior 2 Year Old in Lachute in 2017. Now it is *Lola's* granddaughter *Modo Discjockey Lullabie*, born in April 2020, that is stirring the exhibitor's heart in Vanessa.

Modo 7th Heaven Braxton, EX 2E, is also a show cow. Her best year was in 2016, when she won the 4 Year Old class in Lachute, qualifying for the championship. So far she has not been able to produce any progeny of her level, but as long as she remains in the herd, there is always hope.

The herd also benefits from the descendants of *Modo Carmen Goldwyn*, VG-87 2*, dam to three daughters, all classified VG. *Carmen's*

six granddaughters include two VG and three EX; among them are twins born in 2012: *Modo Twin Aftershock*, EX-91, and *Modo Jumelle Aftershock*, EX.

Finally, *Modo Gaelle illuminate*, VG-88, was another show cow that Vanessa valued greatly. *Gaelle* won first Junior 3 Year Old at both the Lachute and Rive-Nord fairs in 2011, and third Four Year Old at the Rive-Nord show in 2012, but unfortunately died too soon, without leaving any descendants in the herd.

Focusing on both production and conformation

Since becoming involved in genetic selection, Vanessa's objectives have evolved somewhat. Her father, who loved good-looking cows but didn't have any specific goals in mind, focused mostly on fat production and used only young sires. He had abandoned milk recording, so Vanessa re-enrolled on the service to improve milk production. She now chooses well-balanced sires with a conformation proof of at least +10, and as high as possible for milk, with +1000 being the absolute minimum. She uses Ciq's Optimate service to select sires.

The cows and yearlings are divided into three groups. Using the Pro\$ index as her guide, Vanessa has the best cows serviced with sexed semen, giving priority to yearlings and cows at their first and second lactations. The cows in the second group are inseminated with conventional Holstein semen, and those in the last group with Angus bull semen. Should her approach lead to a shortage of



***Modo Lola Jordan*, EX-92 2E, EX-92 2E, the herd's highest classified cow, and with which Vanessa learned the ropes of the showing in 2012, exhibiting her in the Yearling class at both the Lachute and Rive-Nord fairs. The following year, *Lola* won second Junior 2 Year Old and Best Bred and Owned at the Eastern Ontario Western Quebec Championship.**

replacement animals, Vanessa is willing to buy them. Should the occasion arise, she would look for good milk producers, but she would also study their pedigrees to ensure they came from good families.

Despite the interest in production, the two or three cow families with good show potential will be developed to improve the quality of the animals likely to grace the showing. As the proverbial saying goes: "What's bred in the bone will come out in the flesh." ■